[Students delve into New Orleans' Irish history](#)

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Laura Kelley's Hidden History of New Orleans course is uncovering the story of the city using its Irish roots as a roadmap. As her students learn, community resources such as the St. Alphonsus Art and Cultural Center are receiving much-needed assistance.

Historian Laura Kelley is a scholar of the Irish immigration to New Orleans. For her service-learning class, students researched neighborhood life around the St. Alphonsus Art and Cultural Center, formerly a Catholic church. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The cultural center was formerly a historic church in the Irish Channel neighborhood of New Orleans.

"I approached St. Alphonsus and found that they have a small archive that they needed help organizing," says Kelley, an adjunct assistant professor in the Tulane [Department of History](#) and creator of the Hidden History [service-learning](#) course. "My students worked to uncover the nature of the Irish Channel neighborhood where

the church is located, and they were able to uncover who lived and worked there.”

Kelley, a scholar on Irish heritage in New Orleans, says that her students not only assisted in organizing the church's records, but also gathered new information that will be made available to anyone interested in the subject.

Along with determining the demographics of the former Irish-immigrant neighborhood, students researched the histories of a local orphanage and local parochial schools, as well as the accounting records of the church. One group of students created a video consisting of oral histories collected from the neighborhood.

“These are the reasons I love service learning,” says Kelley. “Students are out mingling with the community, and their work doesn't just end after the semester. Those bits of information will continue being there for future researchers to build on.”

The Hidden History of New Orleans course was offered for the first time in the fall 2011 semester.